

Oxford Furnace
Oxford, Warren County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
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133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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Oxford Furnace
Oxford, Warren County, New Jersey

Owner: New Jersey Historical Society

Date of Erection: About 1742

Architect:

Builder: Jonathan Robeson

Present Condition: There is little left of the original furnace except the stack which was originally 38 feet high and is now not more than twenty. At present it is partially filled with debris and trees are growing out of it which will probably cause it to crumble still more. The engine house is still in much the same condition as when built except all the machinery has been removed. The building is starting to crumble.

Materials of Construction: The bosh is built of stone banded with iron rods and lined with fire brick. The engine house is built of brick with a pitch, slate roof

Historical Data:

Andrew Robeson, Sr., and his nephew Andrew Robeson, Jr., came to New Jersey in 1676. The nephew settled in Gloucester County; Jonathan, his third child, the builder of Oxford Furnace, was born here in 1690. In 1702 the family moved to Philadelphia. Toward the end of his life Andrew, Jr. became associated with Thomas Potts in the iron business. After his death Jonathan carried on. Jonathan was an important man in Pennsylvania affairs - a member of the colonial assembly and a judge of common pleas. Although he moved to Hunterdon County, the venture at Greenwich was looked upon as a Philadelphia one.

Oxford Furnace was located in what was then called the town of Greenwich on a branch of the Pequest River. The furnace was built in 1742 and started operation a year later. The original furnace had an eight foot bosh and was thirty-eight feet in height. The output was from thirteen to seventeen tons of pig iron a week. The furnace consumed about three hundred and fifty bushels of charcoal for every ton of iron produced. By the nineteenth century so much charcoal had been used that all the hills within hauling distance were laid bare; the result was that the furnace was discontinued between 1809 and 1831. At that date the Morris Canal was completed and fuel was obtainable. The furnace was started again under the management of William Henry who used hot blast and obtained a patent for it. This process enabled the furnace to produce four tons a day and later when the stack was made higher the output ran up to ten tons a day. In 1882 the furnace went out of blast; it was rebuilt and operated until about 1925.

Much of the early iron was used in making chimney backs which were cast with a device and a motto attached. The earliest date found on a casting made at Oxford is 1755. During the Revolution, the furnace supplied iron for cannons and balls.

Jonathan Robeson sold out to Dr. William Shippen, Sr. Later on the furnace passed to Dr. William Shippen, Jr. and Nicholas Briddle. In 1809 the grandson of Jonathan Robeson, David Morris Robeson, purchased the furnace from the Shippen Estate. During his ownership and during part of his son's, the furnace was out of blast. It was leased in 1831 as mentioned above. The property finally came into possession of the Warren Foundry Company and by them was turned over to its present custodian.

For many years Oxford Furnace was the most important town in Warren County. Here was the only iron furnace producing the pig iron which the forges in the early days needed in order to make bar iron. After 1809 when the making of iron was suspended, the town lost its prestige.

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